

Perceived Respect and Generalized Acceptance in a Multinational Society

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Note:

First, a note to the discussant and panel members at the political science conference. The results I present here are the first outcomes of a study on perceived respect among the Flemish group in Belgium. I am thinking of adding a couple of more studies to give this paper more substance, looking for instance at the role of national identity and perceived group power. I would like to know what you think about such additional studies, how they should be set up and what additional factors may be important. Of course, I also welcome all other comments on the paper. I look forward to meeting you in Maastricht!

Abstract

In this paper, I will argue that the notion of subgroup respect can also be important for members of 'majority groups', especially in a multinational society such as Belgium or the UK. Moreover, an additional explanation of the positive relation between perceived respect and attitudes towards diverse outgroups, which has received little attention in past research, is that perceived respect increases general social trust. The analysis is based on a sample of Dutch-speaking Belgian university students, who have answered questions on perceived respect from French-speaking Belgians, generalized social trust, and attitudes towards French-speaking Belgians and other subgroups in society, such as Muslims, Roma and gays. Results show that perceived respect from French-speaking Belgians is associated with more positive attitudes towards diverse outgroups in society, partly due to increased general social trust. The implication is that positive and respectful relations between the major groups in a multinational society will also have a positive effect on attitudes towards other, smaller, minority groups.

Introduction

Out of a concern with the racism and ethnic prejudice that is still far too common on and around football fields, the international football associations have been campaigning very strongly with two slogans. FIFA uses the phrase "let's kick racism out of football", while the UEFA campaigns simply with the word "respect". This is a prime example of the general concern for positive intergroup relations in today's multicultural societies, and of the popular common sense idea that you should treat other individuals and groups respectfully.

Respect can be defined as fair treatment, specifically the recognition, acceptance and valuation of others in society (Huo & Molina, 2006). The feeling of being respected can naturally apply to the individual level, feeling respected as a person. However, respect can apply to groups as well. Researchers have relatively recently introduced the notion of group respect as an analytical concept in the study of intergroup relations in multicultural societies. As Huo and Molina (2006) have argued, the feeling that one's subgroup (e.g. the Welsh) is respected in society by members of a common group (e.g. the British), can have important positive effects on the attitudes towards the other subgroups (e.g. the English, Scots) that make up the common group and towards society as a whole.

While discrimination can be defined as unfair treatment, it is important to note that perceived respect is not simply the opposite of perceived discrimination. The two are obviously related, as discrimination to some extent implies a lack of respect, but it can be argued that the two are indeed distinct sentiments with different origins and implications (De Vroome, Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2014). It is quite possible that individuals have the impression that their subgroup is generally accepted in society, by many members of the common group, while processes of discrimination can still be encountered.

More importantly, however, respect is grounded in moral principles (Huo & Molina, 2006; Simon & Grabow, 2012). The implication of this notion is quite obvious; while few people would argue that discrimination should be answered with discrimination, it is universally accepted that respect should be answered with respect. Because of its foundation in moral principles, respect is inherently mutual, whether it be on a personal or an a group level. Moreover, as respect is seen as very general it should not merely be reciprocated, but applied to attitudes toward and contacts with all members in society. Regarding intergroup relations, this means that (perceived) subgroup respect is quite powerful, as it will be very directly linked to attitudes toward other subgroups, toward the common group, and toward society as a whole.

While previous studies have mainly shown that perceived respect is important for the well-being and outgroup attitudes of minority groups, this paper focuses on a dominant group in society. More specifically, I focus on the two dominant groups in the multinational Belgian society, and show how perceived respect from one major group to another has implications for the relations with a diverse set of other, smaller, minority groups. Furthermore, it is argued that general social trust can mediate the relation between perceived respect and outgroup attitudes, providing an explanatory mechanism for the effects that have been found in previous studies.

Perceived respect: its origins and implications

As Simon and Grabow (2012) have explained, respect derives from moral principles that govern social interaction in different life domains. They argue that basically three forms of respect can be distinguished. The first is love-based respect that is built upon the care for others in close social relationships. A second form can be called achievement-based respect, related to social esteem. Thirdly, there is respect based on the equality principle, stemming from the domain of legal rights and relations (Simon & Grabow, 2012).

Relatedly, Huo and Binning (2008) have identified two core social-psychological motives for the need of respect: the need for status and the need for social inclusion. The need for status corresponds to equality-based respect, while the need for inclusion or 'liking' corresponds more to the notions of achievement- and love-based respect. Seeing respect as needs-based implies that perceived respect is important for psychological well-being, and this has been confirmed in previous studies. Especially among minority groups, the existing research shows that perceived respect has important consequences in terms of individuals' personal sense of well-being and self-esteem, and in terms of their social engagement (Huo, Binning & Molina, 2010).

Moreover, however, evidence indicates that higher perceived respect also predicts more positive out-group attitudes, as well as more positive feelings towards the nation and higher levels of trust in its institutions (De Vroome, Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2014; Huo, Molina,

Binning, & Funge, 2010). Again, this evidence has been found especially among minority groups. Perceived respect among minorities is positively related to attitudes towards the majority group and the nation, because it signifies that the subgroup is recognized and valued as part of the collective.

Perceived respect and attitudes toward multiple outgroups

The most striking outcome of perceived subgroup respect is not the direct reciprocal relation, subgroup members have a more positive attitude towards the group which they perceive respects them, or the more positive attitude towards society as a whole, but that it can have a positive effect on attitudes towards yet other (third) subgroups in society. Simon and Grabow (2012) have shown, for instance, that gays and lesbians who feel respected by the majority of society tend to have a more positive attitude towards Muslim minorities. The theoretical argument is that the experience of respect affirms the general principle that all subgroups in society are deserving of respectful treatment.

There are more specific mechanisms to be identified in the relation between perceived respect from 'group A' and attitudes towards secondary 'groups B, C, D'. First, it could be expected that there is a mechanism of secondary transfer effects, akin to what has been established in studies on the effects of intergroup contact (Schmid et al., 2012). This implies that perceived respect from 'group A' will not only directly improve attitudes toward this group, but also directly improve attitudes toward 'groups B, C, D. Secondly, the relations can take the form of 'spillover effects', which means that perceived respect from 'group A' will improve attitudes toward 'groups B, C, D' via a more positive evaluation of 'group A'. Such a mechanism is related to the notion of generalized prejudice (Akrami, Ekehammer & Bergh, 2011), and the expectation would thus be that perceived respect from a specific group reduces generalized prejudice.

Third, it can be expected that perceived respect from a specific group gives reason to have a more positive, trusting outlook on life. It has been well established in the literature on generalized trust, for instance, that trust is lower among discriminated groups (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002). Similarly, it is logical to assume that social trust will be higher among members of groups that perceive to be respected. Subsequently, higher levels of social trust can be an important contributor to the reduction of prejudice, as research shows that social trust is negatively related to outgroup attitudes and works as a kind of 'buffer' against these attitudes (Van Der Linden, Hooghe & Marien, 2014).

Majority groups in a multinational society

As noted above, the core motives underlying the importance of respect are the needs for social status and social inclusion. From these motives, it can indeed be theorized that perceived respect matters both to majority group members and minority group members, as the needs for social status, belonging and positive regard are quite universal, as Abraham Maslow (1970) has taught us. Though previous research on subgroup respect has predominantly established that perceived respect matters for ethnic minorities, it can thus be argued that respect does matter for majority groups as well.

Moreover, an important situation, on which we focus in the present paper, is the case where we have 'multiple majority groups' in a multinational society. In this research, we take the case of Belgium, where the two dominant groups are the French-speaking - or Walloon - and the Dutch-speaking - or Flemish - groups. Note, however, that this situation is not unique, as countries like the UK, Canada and Switzerland too have multiple cultural/linguistic groups that can be seen as dominant groups in parts of these countries. In such situations, in which there are several dominant/majority groups, the motives of social status and social inclusion may be more salient for these groups (compared to countries with only one clear majority group), as they also pertain to the intergroup dynamics between the different major groups. Subsequently, the relations between these dominant cultural groups may have important general implications in terms of attitudes toward other subgroups such as Muslims, Roma and homosexuals, as is studied in this paper.

Based on the arguments outlined above, two main hypotheses can be formulated:

H1: The positive relation between perceived respect and acceptance of diverse outgroups, among Flemings, will be mediated by acceptance of Walloons.

H2: The positive relation between perceived respect and acceptance of diverse outgroups, among Flemings, will be mediated by general social trust.

Data and Methods

The analysis is based on a sample of Dutch-speaking Belgian university students, who have answered questions on perceived respect from French-speaking Belgians, generalized social trust, and attitudes towards French-speaking Belgians and other subgroups in society, such as Muslims, Roma and gays.

The dependent variables are measures of positive attitudes towards diverse outgroups. They were measured with the question: 'How close to you feel to the following groups?'. Perceived respect was measured with the following items: 'Flemings are respected by Walloons', 'Flemings are treated fairly by Walloons', and 'Flemings are treated equally by Walloons'. Respondents could answer to these items on a seven-point scale, ranging from

‘totally disagree’ to ‘totally agree’. Analysis shows that the items form a reliable scale (Cronbach’s alpha= .90). In the analysis, the variable perceived respect is a latent variable measured by the three items.

Generalized trust was measured with question, ‘Do you think that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?’. Respondents could answer this question on an eleven-point scale, and it was coded in the analysis so that higher values represent a more trusting attitude. Finally, as control variables, age and gender are included in the analysis.

Descriptive Results

As shown in Table 1, the respondents have quite different attitudes towards each of the outgroups included in this study. Attitudes toward homosexuals are much more positive than attitudes towards Muslims and Roma, the latter group being the least liked of all. It also appears that the respondents in general feel closer to homosexuals than they do to Walloons.

Furthermore, respondents slightly lean toward the idea that most people can be trusted, as the average is about 0.8 points above the neutral midpoint of the scale. The evaluation of perceived respect by Walloons is also generally more positive than negative.

A bit more than half of the respondents is female. Because the sample consists of first-year university students, the average age is naturally between eighteen and nineteen years, with a relatively small standard deviation. The sample does contain some individuals over twenty however, and one 64-year-old student.

Moving on to the bivariate correlations in Table 2, it can be observed that all variables involved in the hypothesized relations are positively correlated. This means that all outgroup evaluations are positively correlated and, more importantly, that all outgroup evaluations are positively correlated with generalized trust and with perceived respect from Walloons.

Results of a Structural Equation Model

The hypotheses are tested with a structural equation model in MPLUS 7. As the bivariate correlations already suggested, the total relations (i.e. direct + indirect relations) between perceived respect from Walloons, on the one hand, and positive attitudes toward Muslims, Roma and homosexuals, on the other, are all positive and significant (Table 3). Table 3 also shows, however, that the direct relations are not significant, but all indirect relations are. In other words, the relations between perceived respect from Walloons and attitudes towards

other outgroups are fully mediated by the attitude towards Walloons and general social trust. This means that both hypotheses are supported by the results.

It is also interesting to look at the specific relations as specified in in Figure 1 and Table 4. As Figure 1 shows, perceived respect is relatively strongly related to both the attitude towards Walloons and to general social trust. Subsequently, there are relatively strong relations between the attitude towards Walloons and the attitudes towards other outgroups. The relations between generalized trust and outgroup attitudes are a bit more modest, but they are significant.

Lastly, Table 4 shows that the control variables gender and age have some significant effects. Older respondents have a less positive attitude towards Roma, while it appears that female respondents have a more positive attitude towards homosexuals. The bottom rows in Table 4 show that the model fits the data quite well.

Discussion

It is being argued in the recent literature that in today's multicultural societies, it is important to examine the relations between multiple ethnic and cultural groups, instead of focusing only on a majority-minority distinction (Havekes, Uunk & Gijsberts, 2011). Though the focus of this paper is on the attitudes of a majority group in Belgium, the contribution is indeed that it sheds some light on the complexity of intergroup relations in a highly diverse society.

The paper demonstrates that the perceived attitude from another group (Walloons / group A) toward the own group (Flemings – group F), are related to attitudes toward diverse outgroups (Muslims, Roma and homosexuals – groups B, C, D). The analysis implies that these relations can be explained by perceived respect from Walloons reducing generalized prejudice (perceived respect is reciprocated, and the more positive attitudes toward Walloons is generalized to other groups as well), and by perceived respect improving generalized trust (leading to a less suspicious attitude towards diverse outgroups). The implication is that positive and respectful relations between the major groups in a multinational society will also have a positive effect on attitudes towards other, smaller, minority groups. In other words, if the major groups in a multinational and multicultural society can get along, smaller subgroups will also be treated better by these groups.

Some important additions might be made to this study. For instance, national (subgroup) identity could be an important mediator and/or moderator of the relation between perceived respect and outgroup attitudes. Previous research has indicated that individuals with a strong subnational (e.g. Flemish) identification have more negative attitudes towards ethnic outgroups, as opposed to individuals who have a stronger, higher-order and more inclusive, national identity (Billiet, Maddens & Beerten, 2003). A perceived lack of respect by

other subgroups may prevent individuals from developing a strong collective identity at the national level, while simultaneously increasing the strength of subnational attachment. Such a mechanism suggest that perceived respect can have an indirect effect on outgroup attitudes, through (sub)national identification.

Furthermore, however, a plausible argument is also that (sub)national identification moderates the relations between perceived respect and outgroup attitudes, on the one hand, and perceived respect and social trust, on the other. Following the logic of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals with a stronger subnational identity may be more sensitive to perceived respect by other subgroups in society, and therefore react more strongly in terms of outgroup attitudes and generalized social trust.

A second aspect of intergroup relations that should perhaps be integrated in this study is the question of power and dominance. Previous research has established that powerful groups tend to perceive more less threat than powerless groups (Kamans, Otten & Gordijn, 2010). Similarly, it might be the case that recognition and respect by other groups matter more to relatively powerless groups than to more powerful groups, as the power of decision-making is associated with self-confidence and a lower need for recognition.

The study as presented here, therefore, may give rise to more extensive analyses on the mechanisms that determine how respect matters for majority groups in society, perhaps also outside a multinational context such as the Belgian case.

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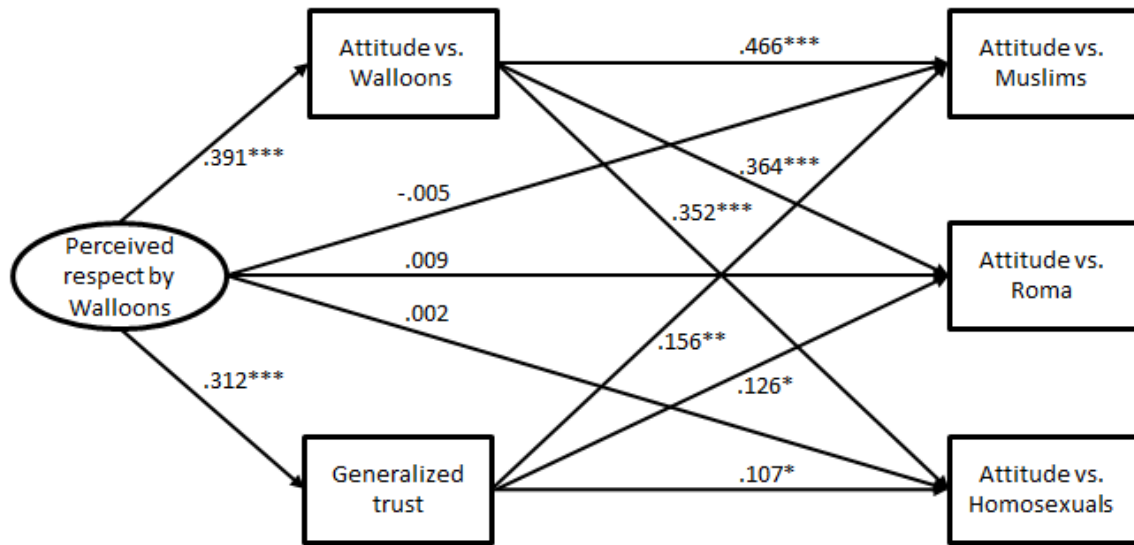
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Figure 1

Direct and indirect relations between perceived respect and outgroup attitudes



Source: KU Leuven student survey. N=290. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ (one-tailed tests).

Notes: Reported are the standardized relations, which are the results of a SEM analysis in MPLUS.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of dependent variables, mediators and independent variables

	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
<i>Dependent variables</i>				
Attitude towards Muslims	0	10	3.383	2.273
Attitude towards Roma	0	10	2.734	2.371
Attitude towards homosexuals	0	10	6.272	2.632
<i>Mediators</i>				
Attitude towards Walloons	0	10	5.262	2.586
Generalized trust	0	10	5.793	2.010
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Perceived respect – item 1	0	6	3.776	1.324
Perceived respect – item 2	0	6	3.883	1.259
Perceived respect – item 3	0	6	3.824	1.292
Perceived respect – scale ¹	0	6	3.828	1.179
Female	0	1	.555	
Age ²	17	64	18.672	3.127

Source: KU Leuven student survey. N=290.

¹ Perceived respect is analyzed as a latent variable in the SEM model.² 11% of the respondents is 17 years old, 57 % is 18 years old, 19 % is 19 years old and 6 % is 20 years old.

Table 2

Bivariate correlations

	Perceived respect	Generalized trust	Attitude vs Walloons	Attitude vs Muslims	Attitude vs Roma	Attitude vs Gays
Perceived respect	1	.300***	.379***	.212***	.163**	.146*
Generalized trust	.300***	1	.313***	.310***	.254***	.187**
Attitude vs Walloons	.379***	.313***	1	.512***	.404***	.381***
Attitude vs Muslims	.212***	.310***	.512***	1	.728***	.395***
Attitude vs Roma	.163**	.254***	.404***	.728***	1	.326***
Attitude vs Gays	.146*	.187**	.381***	.395***	.326***	1

Source: KU Leuven student survey. N=290. *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05.

Table 3

Specific relationships between perceived respect and outgroup attitudes

				b	se	β	p
<i>Attitude towards Muslims</i>							
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Perceived respect	(Total)	.477	.129	.226	***
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Perceived respect	(Direct)	-.012	.124	-.005	
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Perceived respect	(Indirect)	.489	.085	.231	***
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Attitude towards Walloons	← Perceived respect	.386	.074	.183	***
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Generalized trust	← Perceived respect	.103	.041	.049	*
<i>Attitude towards Roma</i>							
Attitude towards Roma	←	Perceived respect	(Total)	.421	.134	.191	**
Attitude towards Roma	←	Perceived respect	(Direct)	.020	.137	.009	
Attitude towards Roma	←	Perceived respect	(Indirect)	.401	.079	.182	***
Attitude towards Roma	←	Attitude towards Walloons	← Perceived respect	.314	.070	.142	***
Attitude towards Roma	←	Generalized trust	← Perceived respect	.087	.043	.039	*
<i>Attitude towards homosexuals</i>							
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Perceived respect	(Total)	.427	.148	.173	**
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Perceived respect	(Direct)	.005	.153	.002	
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Perceived respect	(Indirect)	.422	.086	.171	***
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Attitude towards Walloons	← Perceived respect	.340	.077	.138	***
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Generalized trust	← Perceived respect	.082	.047	.033	*

Source: KU Leuven student survey. N=290. *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05 (one-tailed tests).

Notes: Entries are the result of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Reported are the unstandardized coefficients (b), standard errors (se), standardized coefficients (β) and significance values (p).

Table 4

Detailed model results of the SEM analysis on outgroup attitudes

Path			b	se	β	p
Structural part						
<i>Hypothesized relations</i>						
Attitude towards Walloons	←	Perceived respect	.942	.143	.391	***
Generalized trust	←	Perceived respect	.584	.113	.312	***
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Perceived respect	-.012	.124	-.005	
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Attitude towards Walloons	.409	.049	.466	***
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Generalized trust	.177	.062	.156	**
Attitude towards Roma	←	Perceived respect	.020	.137	.009	
Attitude towards Roma	←	Attitude towards Walloons	.334	.054	.364	***
Attitude towards Roma	←	Generalized trust	.149	.068	.126	*
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Perceived respect	.005	.153	.002	
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Attitude towards Walloons	.361	.060	.352	***
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Generalized trust	.141	.076	.107	*
<i>Control variables</i>						
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Female	.084	.230	.019	
Attitude towards Muslims	←	Age	-.052	.037	-.071	
Attitude towards Roma	←	Female	.343	.255	.072	
Attitude towards Roma	←	Age	-.091	.041	-.120	*
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Female	1.143	.284	.215	***
Attitude towards homosexuals	←	Age	.053	.046	.063	
<i>Covariances</i>						
Attitude towards Walloons	w.	Generalized trust	.991	.277	3.867	***
Attitude towards Muslims	w.	Attitude towards Roma	2.628	.283	19.287	***
Attitude towards Muslims	w.	Attitude towards homosexuals	1.115	.272	4.499	***
Attitude towards Roma	w.	Attitude towards homosexuals	.938	.297	3.327	**
Measurement part						
Perceived respect	by	Item 1	1.000		.811	
Perceived respect	by	Item 2	1.040	.060	.887	***
Perceived respect	by	Item 3	1.087	.062	.904	***
Model fit						
Chi ²			30.919			
DF			20			
CFI			.989			
TLI			.977			
RMSEA			.043			
N			290			

Source: KU Leuven student survey. *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05 (one-tailed tests for hypothesized effects).

Notes: Entries are the result of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Reported are the unstandardized coefficients (b), standard errors (se), standardized coefficients (β) and significance values (p). CFI = Comparative Fit Index, TLI = Tucker Lewis Index, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Appendix

Table A.1

R-squares final model

	Estimate
Structural part	
Attitude towards Walloons	.153
Generalized trust	.097
Attitude towards Muslims	.291
Attitude towards Roma	.202
Attitude towards homosexuals	.206
Measurement part	
Perceived respect – item 1	.658
Perceived respect – item 2	.787
Perceived respect – item 3	.818

Source: KU Leuven student survey. N=290.

Table A.2

Intercepts, variances and residual variances final model

	est.	se	p
Intercepts			
Perceived respect – item 1	3.776	.078	***
Perceived respect – item 2	3.883	.074	***
Perceived respect – item 3	3.824	.076	***
Attitude towards Walloons	5.262	.152	***
Generalized trust	5.793	.118	***
Attitude towards Muslims	1.123	.880	
Attitude towards Roma	1.624	.974	
Attitude towards homosexuals	1.931	1.086	
Variances			
Perceived respect	1.150	.141	***
Residual variances			
Perceived respect – item 1	.597	.062	***
Perceived respect – item 2	.337	.047	***
Perceived respect – item 3	.303	.049	***
Attitude towards Walloons	5.641	.477	***
Generalized trust	3.635	.305	***
Attitude towards Muslims	3.642	.302	***
Attitude towards Roma	4.467	.371	***
Attitude towards homosexuals	5.548	.461	***

Source: KU Leuven student survey. N=290. *** p<.001.